



PROMOTING HERITAGE EDUCATION IN UGANDA

◆ Overview

This policy brief responds to the urgent need to preserve and promote Uganda's rapidly vanishing cultural heritage. An appreciation of heritage is often learnt in both formal and informal spaces, and nurtured over time. This implies a long term endeavour which requires deliberate and consistent intervention. Due to a breakdown of family values, coupled with limited formal spaces to learn about heritage, there is a general lack of understanding and value attached to cultural heritage in Uganda. This policy brief therefore presents a case for the institutionalization of heritage education in syllabi at various levels, with a specific focus on secondary schools.

◆ Our vanishing national heritage

Many of us, at one stage or another, will agree that cultural heritage is important, although some may consider it a thing of the past - to be safely stored in museums or quickly replaced by "modernity". Whichever position we choose to take, we must realise that we are the authors of tomorrow's cultural heritage. We therefore have the responsibility to define what aspects of our heritage should be preserved and passed on to future



generations and to ensure that what is preserved accurately reflects our identity.

Although Uganda is a signatory to a number of international instruments to conserve heritage, studies show that our tangible and intangible cultural heritage is rapidly being destroyed and that whatever remains is constantly at risk of destruction. This has been attributed to an acute ignorance of the value of cultural heritage, coupled with a lack of political will and supportive mechanisms to preserve it¹.

Some cultural activists and promoters have made an effort to protect various aspects of our national heritage through Community museums², cultural festivals, and other culture related activities, but the appreciation of our cultural heritage in the general public remains disturbingly low. This is reflected in the destruction of sites

and buildings of cultural and historical significance, resistance to using local languages as a medium of instruction, and general disregard for indigenous knowledge and skills.

The Uganda Museum, and the Uganda National Cultural Centre (under a 1959 Act of Parliament), have been mandated to support non-formal cultural heritage education. The financial resources³ allocated to these institutions, is however not sufficient to implement fully fledged universal heritage education programmes.

Further, in a country as diverse as Uganda with 65 ethnic groups, promoting and protecting cultural heritage does not come naturally - it has to be learnt. At 50 years, Uganda is still recovering from the colonial legacy of dismissing culture as primitive and negative. The

1 Uganda National Commission of UNESCO (2011) State of Heritage Education in Uganda: A sustainable way of conserving our Heritage

2 CCFU (2012) Community Museums in Uganda

3 CCFU (2013) Funding Status of Uganda's Cultural Sector

youth, who are the future custodians of our heritage, have not had an opportunity to appreciate the positive aspects of culture directly. They therefore need to be supported to respect and preserve our collective heritage for posterity. With the advent of globalization, this is especially difficult for the youth who are constantly overwhelmed by large volumes of often well-packaged knowledge, originating from diverse foreign cultures.

◆ Heritage education: some experiences to date

Some institutions have taken the initiative to work with the youth to enhance their appreciation of cultural heritage. One such venture is the Ekisaakate⁴, a programme established by the Queen of Buganda, Nnabagereka Sylvia Naginda Luswata, which aims at nurturing a new and complete society by educating young people on African values and the Kiganda culture. The increasing demand and participation in the Ekisaakate since its inception in 2007 is an indication that there is a growing need to learn about cultural heritage. Also notable is the increasing number of non-Baganda and non-Ugandans willing to pay to participate in this programme.

Secondly, in 2010, the Uganda National Museum initiated a pilot heritage education programme that aimed at promoting cultural heritage in secondary schools in Gulu, Kampala and Kabarole.

Third, in 2011, the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda also embarked on a heritage education programme that aims at enhancing the recognition of the importance of heritage in Uganda's current development context. This currently involves working with heritage clubs in 27 secondary schools in Kabale, Kibaale, Mbarara, Kyotera, Jinja and Kitgum districts. Using a heritage education tool kit, a series of activities are carried out to help the youth better understand the value of cultural heritage. These include visits to community museums, inter-school and national heritage competitions, debates, exhibitions and talks on heritage. A national conference on raising the profile of cultural heritage in Uganda was also organised for a cross-section of stakeholders. The response by teachers and students in the selected schools confirmed the demand and benefits of heritage education to the individual students, the teachers, the schools and the wider public.

These initiatives are however limited in scope and accessibility, often exclusive to partner schools or, as is the case with the Ekisaakate, limited to youth within and around Kampala who are able to afford the fees charged for the holiday camp.

Preliminary meetings with policy makers at the National Curriculum Development Centre revealed the possibility of including heritage education in the national education curriculum for secondary schools. More efforts, however, need to be made to ensure that this becomes a reality.

⁴ The 'Ekisaakate' is a cultural programme that aims at nurturing young girls and boys into 'holistic' persons, social managers and leaders who appreciate and harmonize both traditional and modern values.

◆ Our key message

- ➔ Promoting and preserving our cultural heritage is a collective responsibility that has to be learnt. The most effective way to enhance this collective learning is through education that is accessible to as many Ugandan youth as possible.
- ➔ Our heritage is unique to Uganda, and if harnessed, can be an excellent springboard for innovation, creativity and new knowledge. Cultural heritage needs to be appreciated for its intrinsic value as well as for its potential as a source of revenue and employment.
- ➔ Heritage education has the potential to enhance a sense of identity and self esteem; to promote creative expression; to give meaning to other bodies of knowledge and to foster national pride and patriotism among the youth.

◆ A call for action!

To address this important but neglected aspect of our development, we should:

- 1. Integrate heritage education in the upcoming national curriculum for secondary schools in Uganda.**
- 2. Retain the use of local languages as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools as an important aspect of heritage preservation and cultural identity.**
- 3. Invest in building the capacity and competence of school teachers to educate the youth about cultural heritage, supported by adequate materials nationwide (resource allocation to be included in the National Budget).**
- 4. Provide for the recognition, as well as technical and financial support to Community Museums as centres for heritage education in the proposed Museum and Monument Policy (2013) and the National Budget**
- 5. Gazette the Uganda Museum as a national heritage site and centre for heritage education and research**
- 6. Ensure that the National Council for Higher Education supports tertiary institutions to develop courses on heritage studies and related disciplines**

Who is CCFU?

The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) is a Ugandan Non-Governmental Organisation established in 2006 to promote the recognition of culture as vital for human development that reflects our national identity and diversity. The Foundation is formally registered under the Non-Governmental Organisations Registration Statute, 1989.



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